

## Associational Strategy Planning:

### Empowering Your Association Through a Shared Vision

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As I was beginning to work on this project, I also began to read the autobiography of Reverend Billy Graham, *Just As I Am*. It was a moving experience for me. Having been born just short of two decades after Billy, I could remember most of the events he discusses. Powerful memories of the points at which our lives had intersected flooded my mind and heart as I read. His honest humility caused me to appreciate him once more at an even deeper level.

Related to this project, specifically, I note again and again how he blended prayer, planning and patience as he sought to know and do the will of God in his life. His crusades were models of careful strategic planning. Years of hard work and careful attention to details went into the great evangelism events for which he became famous. He was driven by a sense of mission to share the Gospel with the lost, to revive the churches and to disciple new believers. He used all of the appropriate technology available to him to address his vision, his mission. He stayed focused on his sense of call. The plans were always wrapped in prayer. He prayed. He had prayer support groups organized to pray for the event. He prayed as he did the event. From time to time, in his prayer he experienced the leadership of God to revise his plans, even to move off in other directions. The point is that in his life and ministry, Billy Graham experienced a dynamic interplay of planning and prayer. Unlike some, he did not just pray and neglect to plan. But also, like some he did not just plan and neglect prayer. To these two points must be added a third observation: Graham was patient. Often he had a vision of a new ministry years before the time was ripe for it to happen. His trips and crusades in Russia and China are important examples of this fact. He could wait for God to open doors at his appoint time.

The material presented in here has to do with a process for an association of Baptist churches to use in seeking a vision, God's vision, for the work of the churches, collectively, in the area that is served by the association. It is driven by the Great Commission. It is bathed in prayer. It is informed by gathering and analyzing information. It is an organized, step by step plan for moving from the is to the ought to be. But it is always a tentative plan, one open to revision as the context changes and/or God gives further light. Often the plan is less than the full vision that the association has, but it is the current best it can do toward reaching the grander vision. It is, in short, a process that will enable the association to experience the dynamic interplay of prayer, planning and patience as it seeks to find and do the will of God. The process described herein is directed to the associations of churches in the rural/small town areas of the states of the Old Convention. These include more than 700 associations which serve most of the more than 1200 counties of the United States where the Baptist movement is the dominant or primary expression of Christian church life. At this point it is a work in process. If you use it please make suggestions for its improvement and clarification. I firmly believe that the great success of Baptists in this region in the Twentieth Century is tied to their connection in

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associations. It is my hope to support our continued effectiveness through providing this process.

#### *Associationalism*

Associations are a form of organization that stand somewhere between an institution and a society or network. It is comprised of members who joined voluntarily because they affirm its purpose(s). It can dismiss member, but not control them. And members can freely elect to leave the association. Usually, an association has a broader

set of objectives and activities than does a society. Always it has less power over its members than does an institution. In the case of an association of churches, the churches associate in order to accomplish some tasks and to have relationships that are important to the churches. The churches benefit from their participation in the association. The churches can decide at some point that they no longer want to participate. Or the association may elect at some point to bar a church from further participation. But generally, the benefits of participation are such that churches and the association work to find ways that the relationship can continue.

Associationalism has a long and distinguished history in the development of the Baptist movement within the frame of the larger Christian enterprise. It has been the primary, frontline mechanism by which local, autonomous churches have cooperated to respond to the challenges and opportunities that they faced within their ministry context. Among the concerns that have been addressed in associations are the following:

- \* Fellowship
- \* Public Image
- \* Statements of Shared Beliefs
- \* Church Planting
- \* Evangelization
- \* Missions--Local, National, and Global
- \* Education and Training
- \* Ministries
- \* Policy Statements on Moral and Social issues
- \* Good Counsel
- \* Conflict Resolution

Baptist found that by cooperating greater resources, more power, and larger levels of involvement resulted. We also have found that it has treated the tendency to be blinded by a kind of spiritual myopia which focuses too exclusively on our own ministry field. The association prods one to see more broadly and missionally. It also may keep a church and

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its people from becoming complacent.

God has blessed Baptists in and through associationalism. A common theme in the history of associationalism has been its ability to respond to a changing context. As the world has changed and the work of churches has responded, associations have also changed by adding new tasks, shifting emphases, and handing off old efforts. Since the mid 1600s when English Baptist first formed associations, the following eras can be identified:

- \*The Age of Hostility
- \*The Age of Revival
- \*The Age of Westward Expansion and World Missions
- \*The Age of Modernization
- \*The Dawning of a Future Age

It is not necessary to retell the whole story of each era here. But it is important for us to take note of the fact that we seem to be drawing toward the end of the Age of Modernization and the dawning of a future age often called the Post-modern, and/or the Information Age. This will make planning both more necessary and more difficult.

The association based itself on the Bible and the Great Commission. It identified functions that it might assist the churches in doing more effectively, and more efficiently. It relied upon the churches for resources. It was structured and staffed in ways that seemed appropriate for the doing of its work within the frame of its context.

Since World War II in response to the Age of Modernization, the focus of specific Southern Baptist associations has tended to be on one or more of the following:

- \*Help the rural churches become modern, programmatic churches
- \*Help churches birth new congregations in and around the growing cities of the Sun Belt.
- \*Plant new congregations outside the territory that had been served by Southern Baptists prior to World War II, beginning with Southern transplants and growing toward indigenation.

I sense that many of the rural, Old Convention associations are at a point of turning. This is brought about by one or more of the following conditions:

- \*Most of the churches have modernized, at least as much as they will to do.
- \*Inflation has driven up the cost of doing associational work as it has been done for the past 50 years.
- \*Shifting demographics are bringing new challenges that the old ways may not be able to respond to adequately.

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\*The Industrial Age concept that “there is one best way to do things” is being widely challenged. Old structures do not seem adequate to hold the “new wine” of the Baptist movement and of what God is doing just now.

This means that many Old Convention rural associations will need to do some very basic strategy planning as they move toward the next century. This will mean not just tinkering with what they now have, but rather the formulation of a new vision. For many it will mean the REINVENTION of the association. For many this will be the second or third time that they have made significant modifications in their focus and work. Like me you have probably heard some folk ask the question, “Why do we need associations any more with modern means of transportation and communication?” My response is that they have kept the Baptist movement in the hands of people at the grassroots. They are crucial to Baptists if we want God to continue to use us and bless us as He has done in the past.

Already for more than a decade associations have been doing just this. The results have been mixed. I believe that I have gained access to a process that will insure better results. What I will do in the paragraphs that follow will be to draw upon the literature of the community development specialists to present some concepts and processes that an association might use to plan for its future. (The primary source is *Harnessing the Power of Vision*, written by Mark Peterson and published by the Cooperative Extension Service of Arkansas.)

#### *The Desired Future*

The Bible teaches that God desires that everyone will bow before Jesus and confess that Jesus is Lord. When this is coupled with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), one realizes that individual believers and their churches need to be actively evangelizing and disciplining.

Cooperating in an association, Baptists have endeavored to assist in making this desired future occur, particularly within the bounds of the area served by the association. So, a driving question of any strategic plan for an association must be how can we work with God to evangelize and disciple people here? Some have added, how can we structure social life to address all forms of evil as well as promoting good? (Because of our Baptist commitment to Soul Liberty and the attendant concept of the responsibility of each person before God, we have struggled more than most with just how to apply the Gospel to social structures in a “fallen,” pluralistic society.)

In the planning process, then, an association moves from the general statement of God’s desired future to a formulation of a more short-ranged statement of the possible desired future for its area, as a kind of approximation of the ideal. So, while we will pray that God’s “Kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven”, we will be seeking to

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understand how God would have us take concrete steps toward that end here over the next few years. In doing this there are some key questions that must be considered:

- \*Where have we been; what is our story
- \*Where are we now
- \*Where do we believe that God wants us to be in five years
- \*How does He want us to get there
- \*What will this mean in terms of activities, projects, staffing, structure and budget
- \*How will we know when we get there
- \*How will we be able to stay open to God's leading beyond our current plans?

To attempt to do this we will be looking at information/data. What do we know about who lives within the association now? What are the trends in terms of people--age, race, income, education, needs? Who are the unchurched folk in our area? What do we know about our churches? What do we know about religious groups and churches other than the Baptist ones related to our association? What services and ministries are in place? What has our association been doing? What are other associations doing? What resources are available to us in reaching toward God's desired future? How can we best structure the association to do the work we want it to do for the extension of God's Kingdom? And other questions will emerge. Above all, the data must be prayed over. As we gather and analyze data, ask for expect from God experiences of illumination as He reveals specific actions that He wills for the association to take.

#### *The Power of the Vision*

The goal of the process should be to come out of it with a shared vision for the future. Its power will reside in the following:

- \*It is from God
- \*It is shared by those who have worked on the process
- \*It comes from the heart as much as from the head
- \*It is bathed in prayer
- \*It arises from our deepest Christian values
- \*It describes what our association is really about
- \*It leaps over present constraints
- \*It provides meaning, purpose and direction to our efforts.

As we examine data, analyze, evaluate, ask questions, pray, and share what we are learning, wondering, and hearing--we will get a picture of what is, really. Then we will think about how we can address the opportunities that God has set before us, our

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churches and our association. From this will come a compelling shared vision and a plan for the achievement of the vision.

It has been my observation of most vision statements that they are so general that they might be used by most any association. As you work for a vision statement, you will need to try to attain these standards:

- \* describe how we serve our constituents--primarily the churches, and our Lord
- \* be bold in describing a high and holy purpose
- \* present our deep, driving values
- \* state our unique role in the work God wills to do in this place
- \* express the vision in vivid language
- \* be specific, concise and brief.

This is not easy. But it seems to be necessary. (Some examples will be provided in an appendix. This vision statement will be an important, foundational product of the process.)  
*Empowerment*

When the process is an honest one that is grounded in seeking the specific will of God, is inclusive of all elements and interests in the churches, is focused on serving the churches and their visions, is grounded in a valid understanding of the opportunities, needs, changes in the mission context, and really seeks to discover the will of God--then it is empowered and empowering. Baptists need to see the association as helping them and their church to do what they believe God wants done. Typically, this will mean that the association will be doing things and providing resources that are high priorities in the hearts and minds of the churches. But sometimes this may mean that the association will be doing some things that are not high priorities for all, but are for a significant few. The association's program is empowered because it is from God, because it addressed the concerns of the majority, and because it addresses the needs of minorities.

The fact that the association is doing things that are valued by the churches and their people will build its level of support and enable it to do more in future planning cycles. A wisdom statement among long-time mission strategists is, "Money follow mission". I take this to mean that when the people and the churches see their money and time being used to achieve things which they value, then they will find more time and money and other resources to support the work of the association. Again, there seems to be a synergy about the process.

#### *Keys to a Successful Strategic Visioning and Action Process*

1. Develop a passion for your community, its peoples and its churches, for the vision and

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for its realization.

2. Help people realize that their future depends on their ability to work together in church, in community and in the association.
3. Be sensitive to timing.
4. Build trust.
5. Establish legitimacy
6. Reach out to all segments of your community, your association.
7. Develop a grand, magnificent vision.
8. Work with those who catch the vision.
9. Create early success, sustain the momentum and commit to the long term.
10. Do not worry about the money at the beginning.
11. Weave your strategic vision and action plan into the very fabric of your association.
12. Act as if the future of your association and your community depends on you. It does.

This list is taken from Mark Peterson in *Harnessing the Power of Vision*. It has been baptized. It seems to summarize much of what has been said to this point. My friend, sometimes boss and mentor, Leon Boyd, would say much the same, I believe. He feels that often good associational strategic plans fail because of neglecting to address number 11 well. It is just here that too often the plan is wrecked. The other 11 are also important. Keep them in mind as you move forward.

Now, let's shift our attention to a description of the actual process. First, we will look at a set of 10 suggested steps to take in doing the process. Second, we will focus on the meetings that generate the actual vision. I will again be drawing from the Cooperative Extension Service material. As I see it, the basic difference is that they are looking at the creation of a new organization for the process. We are looking at working with an existing organization. So we need to be more focused on the implications for the possible restructuring (reinvention) of an existing organization. I will attempt to address this as I go along.

*Ten Steps for the Associational Strategy Planning Process*

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### 1. Begin the process.

Meet with a small group of key persons who are committed to associationalism. Share your belief that a visioning process must be done. Outline the steps that must be taken. Identify the other leaders in the churches and the association who need to be involved. Who knows the area and its trends? Who understands the basic functions of the association? Who are the influentials and gatekeepers? Develop a list of persons who should be invited to an organizational meeting. Plan an informational meeting.

### 2. Engage the association and legitimate the process.

This may be at an executive board meeting and at an annual meeting. Explain why it is important to develop a plan. Explain the process. Explain how it can help the churches be more effective in accomplishing the tasks of the Great Commission.

### 3. Hold an organizational/training meeting.

Having invited the persons you want and explained what they could contribute to the process and what they would be doing, briefly, then invite them to a meeting at which the process would be explained. (Often this is conducted by a consultant.) Make certain that everyone understands the purpose and the process and the role they are to play in it. It is very important that everyone sees how the parts fit. Data gathering has usually fit into the following categories:

- \*Demographics--trends related to population stability and change, income, education, etc.

- \*Church data--from the churches related to the association indicating trends, compared to the demographic data.

- \*Other religious bodies--what are the other churches doing, or failing to do? What is working? Where can we cooperate?

- \*Social systems/services--what do the agencies and officials sense need to be done in relation to ministry of the churches? (Some associations are using the CCM needs assessment material here.)

- \*Organizational analysis of the association--what it has been doing and how it is structured. This may be preliminary for some changes that the new vision will necessitate.

- \*Trends--asking key community leaders and agency where they see change taking the area served by the association over the next five to ten years.

Increasingly, associations are asking the churches to do their own strategic planning and making the results a part of the data package that is presented at the retreat.

### 4. Develop a Strategic Vision and Action Plan

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The approach we have taken has been to handle this in a retreat setting. Usually, it begins on a Friday evening and continues through noon the following day. The Cooperative Extension model calls for three evening meetings. Since this is the major part of the processes, I will devote a full, major section to it after I outline the 10 basic steps. Here, I will simply say that the data that has been collected will be presented, brainstorming related to the implications of the data will be conducted, the ideas surfaced here will be collected and organized, priorities will be developed, a vision statement will be worked upon, and some ideas about actions to take will be surfaced. This is a lot to get done in a retreat, I have found. And it is very intense. But to ask for a consultant to make two additional trips to the association may be too costly. My experience has been to have some real tension between getting the job done and not allowing everyone to have a say and to do some quality reflection. If the process is hurried, one may come up the plan of the Missionary or of the Consultant, not the one that should arise naturally from the group of leaders.

In any case either at the retreat or in the work of a small group that follows up on the retreat, a purpose statement is formulated which sets the vision for the future of the association, some goals and objectives are hammered out, and some action plans are developed. Generally, a good consultant can be of real help here. Often the associational leaders have not had much experience with setting goals and objectives and action plans. The consultant can help them flow logically from one another.

#### 5. Seek Feedback and Commitment from the Association

This means that the basic report should be distributed to the churches. It should be presented, discussed, modified if needed and voted on at the next meeting of the Executive committee. Then it should be carried to the next annual or semi-annual meeting of the association. This should be a major, carefully done presentation. Graphics would be very helpful. It must be sold to the association for what it is. Work to get real commitment from the churches, the members and the program leaders of the association.

#### 6. Publicize the Plan.

Plug the plan. Share it with the churches. Go out and have listening sessions. Share ownership. Talk about the vision. Help the members see how this vision supports what their church is doing, and how they have a role to play in the implementation of the vision. Use the vision repeatedly in the associational news letter.

As the association does it work, keep the plan before everyone. When an event happens that the plan called for, say so. When a change is made that the plan called for, say so. When a resource is added that the plan called for, say so.

#### 7. Implement the Plan

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If my beginning comments were correct, this process will result in some major changes in many rural, Old Convention associations. Calendar may change. Staffing may change. Focus may change. My sense is that many are still working out of the SBC's vision of 1945 to modernize the rural churches by getting them to become program churches; i.e., getting them to have the basic programs that were located at the Sunday School Board. This brought great and needed change. Most rural churches had worship only once or twice a month before 1945. Many had only Sunday School and perhaps Woman's Missionary Union. In the wake of this effort hundreds of associations hired their first associational missionary. His/her primary task was to promote the programs. They had success. Many rural churches became strong, active, well-resourced congregations. Some did not. And those that have not after 50 years probably will not. Consequently, some small, stable rural associations may no longer need, and may no longer be able to afford a full-time Associational Missionary. Resources and activities may need to be redirected. Some associations may need to merger with their neighbors. Others may need to cooperate and call a missionary to serve several associations. Some may only need a consultant, or set of consultants, for occasional training events. Some events that once were monthly or quarterly may need to become annual. Some ministries may have served their purpose, or failed. Resources may need to be redirected.

If many changes are called for, there will be some pain. And there may well be some mistakes. But move to implement the plan. Keep it before the people and the churches. Of course, some changes in the context may dictate that the plan be modified. Do it. But have a reason.

Have some successes early on. Hold some events, do a project, create a ministry, or make an advance that the churches and the people will applaud.

#### 8. Evaluate the Overall Effort.

This is where coordinated annual planning come to bear. Each year as calendar and budget are planned, the strategy plan must be examined. Is progress being made? Are modifications needed? Do we know somethings now that we did not know when we planned? Have we made some mistakes? Is our plan for this year in keeping with our vision?

#### 9. Celebrate Success.

Thank God for the victories He has given. Also thank the people whom He has used. Remember, out of the success may come a bolder, more imaginative, more godly vision for the next cycle.

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#### 10. Create an Ongoing Development Process.

This is the role that the Missions Development Council plays in many associations. It can keep the data up to date. It can keep folk focused on the missional role of the association. Use it.

#### *The Process for Formulating the Vision*

Here I will enlarge upon the fourth of the Ten Steps which were presented earlier. The content will be five questions drawn from *Harnessing the Power of Vision*. The first two of these questions will be addressed by sharing data that has been gathered by the groups which were identified and trained in step three. The format for the sharing may be either a weekend retreat, or a series of meetings. (Most associations have, in the past, used the retreat model.) An answer, at least a tentative one, will be the primary product of the sharing session. The fourth will be assigned and shaped by appropriate sub-groups following the sharing session. The fifth will be the work of whomever has oversight responsibilities in the association, probably the executive committee.

The process will have three basic objects for study--the area served by the association and its churches, the association as an organization, and the churches which comprise the association. As the work goes forward, it will be important to remember these three objects and in the analysis of data to attempt to find connections and correlations.

#### 1. *Where have we come from?*<sup>2</sup>

In most Old Convention associations you can find someone who has taken as a hobby the study of the settlement and development of the county or counties served by the association. And many places prepared local histories as part of the national bicentennial in 1976. Arrange for a brief summary, oral or written, of this history.

Next, focus on the history of the association from either 1940 or 1950 to the present. Draw upon the old annual minutes of the association, census data on the county or counties, and the agricultural census which is done in the years ending in two and in seven. (There is probably an agricultural extension agent in one of your churches who can be enlisted to work on the community and agricultural data for you. The associational clerk might be a good choice for gathering the historical data on change in the churches.) Look for and highlight in a report changes in the following:

- \* number of churches and membership
- \* programs of the churches
- \* income of the churches
- \* income in the counties

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\*population developments--numbers, race and gender distribution

\*when an associational missionary was hired, an office built, and various ministries of the association formed.

\*important, defining, events in associational and area life

In many instances you will discover that very real progress has been made in the past half century or so, often in spite of declining and aging population numbers. This will do several things for the process. You will see how God has blessed in the past. You will affirm the leaders of the past who, working with a vision from God, helped make this happen. You will build courage and hope as you plan for the future.

#### *2. Where do we seem to be now?*

At this point the data about the current status and projected trends in the population, the Baptist churches, other churches, the economy, social service agencies and so forth that has been gathered by the study groups should be presented in concise attractive ways with lots of visuals. View this material through the lenses of The Great Commission. As you hear about the current state of things and projected trends, keep asking, "What are the implications of these facts for the work of the churches? How can the association support the churches, and extend the churches in their response?" Probably, you will find that some of the participants are familiar with the SWOTS approach to analysis. It asks--what are our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Ask them to use these lenses as well as they move to think about how the churches and the association can respond. At this point in the process the group will probably focus more on opportunities and threats, although the strengths and weaknesses will surface some. Note that the fact that you began with a review of the past history of the work of the association and the churches should buttress the process so that the group will not necessarily feel overwhelmed by the gap between the opportunities and threats on the one hand and their strength on the other.

In this process I will try to take note of how the census data about people and the church data about members match up. Do I see some clues about racial, socioeconomic, lifestyle, or age cohort groups that we need to target with new ministries? I will look to find opportunities for ministries and see if there are existing resources that can be matched up with them. I will think about training that the association might develop or sponsor that would equip Christians to reach and disciple the unchurched. I will look for areas where the population is changing or growing in order to consider if a new work or a renewal of an old congregation might be suggested. Particular in rural associations, will try to be sensitive to events and gatherings of people where a church or several churches coordinating with the association might offer a ministry. Examples might include homecomings in some of the towns, flea markets, or fishing rodeos. In the Old Convention area the Baptists are the dominant expression of Christianity. Much has been given to us, so I assume that Jesus

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expects much from us. This can take lots of directions. Certainly it means ministry to hurts and good counsel. It also means advocacy of justice and of responsibility. I believe that it also calls for active support of efforts to build true community among the people who reside in the places served by the association. Most of the places served by the churches in the associations of the rural south are being impacted by change. It seems to me that the associations should consider their prophetic role in speaking to these changes, hoping to build into them the values of love and justice. Concerns about care for people, support of good education, development that is sensitive to the environment, cooperation between towns whose heritage was competition, protection of children from vice, and attention to the special needs of the elderly should be voiced. There is historical precedence for this. Back where the nation was forming two centuries ago, it was the Baptist associations that led the fight for religious freedom. Their success shaped how communities were formed during the period of western expansion. It is my belief that associations should speak out again for freedom as new patterns of community life are being formed today.

Because of what I have just written, as well as because of the presuppositions stated at the opening of this material, it is very important that in responding to the next question that there be an openness to recreating the association, if that is indicated. Please be open to the process being or becoming more than simply modifying what currently exists. As you think and pray about what God wants done in the area served by the association, be aware that He might want a very different configuration, calendar of event, staffing, deployment of resources, and so forth. If He does, then you had best move in that direction.

#### 3. *Where does God want us to go?*

In a retreat setting it is best to cover the first two questions in an evening session which is followed by intense small group and individual prayer. Ask the participants to focus upon what they have heard and seen. Ask them to consider what it means in terms of The Great Commission. Ask them to recognize that the diversity within the group will mean that God will not give His whole vision to any one person, but rather that he will illuminate parts of it to those whose perspective prepares them for that truth. Ask them to come in the morning to share what God has impressed them with. You might ask them to write these statements on 3 x 5 cards and submit them at breakfast. You or a colleague could then categorize and summarize the comments and write them on large sheets. When the group assembles you could then deal with a sheet at a time. Once covered post it on the wall. As the process proceeds some common themes will surface. In time these will congeal in the form of Objectives and perhaps Goals.

Some warnings. While you are seeking consensus on the primary functions of the association for the churches be careful that you do not discard what may be a word from God that came only to one participant. What she/he offered may be something that God is preparing the way for the association to focus on in the future. Second, keep focusing back

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on the three concerns--the churches, the association and the communities in the association. While the needs of the context may call for one of the three to be given primary emphasis in this planning cycle, attention must be given to all three. Third, exercise care that the process not be captured by a strong personality with a personal agenda rather than one seeking the will of God.

Generally, this is about all that can be accomplished in this setting. The polishing and articulation of the vision with a set of objectives and goals will be assigned to the consultant and the committee members for follow-up meetings.

#### 4. *How will we get there?*

The ASP committee and their consultant will take the data from the retreat and work on giving it more formal shape. Often this begins on Saturday afternoon after the retreat has adjourned. Usually, the retreat has surfaced needs related to church development, prayer, evangelism, ministry, family life and missions. These can be stated in concise and attractive ways. Share this formulation with those who participated in the retreat to make certain that they believe that the committee has been faithful to what the retreat surfaced.

In turn for the association to address these objectives, the calendar, budget, and perhaps the structure of the association will be impacted. The committee will need to get counsel from the association program leaders and consultants as they set goals and form action plans related to the objectives. For example, if an objective is to share the Gospel with every person over ten years of age within the bounds of the association, then the leader of the Evangelism program of the association should be asked to help in designing a set of goals and action plans drawing upon various resources for the years covered in the planning cycle. This would likely include a set of training opportunities, events, and other activities. These would need to be calendared and budgeted for.

Once the ASP committee has put the plan together, then it needs to be presented to the association's executive committee, adopted by the association at an annual meeting, and publicized among the churches and in the community.

An appendix will be provided as an example of what some similar associations have done. I do this with reservations. Some fear that this will curtail creativity in the process as some might say, "Well, what that association did looks pretty good to me, let's kind of copy it." Please do not do that. Rather look at them as examples of some of the diversity that has resulted in the past. Let them say to you that there is a freedom under God to seek His will and do what He directs. It is an example, not a guide.

*For me to keep the promise of the last paragraph, I will need for some of you to contribute your plan for inclusion on this site. I have found this to be a good strategy.*